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ABSTRACT

Appalachia has a history of isolation, poverty, substandard education and services, and economic exploitation by outside forces, but also has a long history of resistance and community organizing. This paper describes three rural Appalachian community organizations whose mission is the strengthening and empowering of communities as well as improving individual literacy skills. McClure River Valley Community Development Center (southwest Virginia), the Ivanhoe (Virginia) Civic League, and Appalachian Communities for Children (Jackson County, Kentucky) host a variety of community activities and programs, such as those concerned with food distribution, housing rehabilitation, preschool education and child care, adult basic education and GED classes, community college classes, tutoring, counseling, and coordination of student volunteers providing community service. All three organizations have also provided many informal opportunities for learning and literacy use, and staff and board members have learned job skills and the knowledge and skills needed to run an organization. However, although these organizations are committed to empowering community members and bringing about change, their educational programs tend to be highly structured around traditional curriculum. The groups themselves recognize the contradictions and are working to change and democratize their classes, but the work is hard. Difficulties include powerful cultural images and attitudes concerning what school is "supposed" to be, and lack of experience with alternative approaches. (SV)

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Chapter 19

APPALACHIAN COMMUNITIES: WORKING TO SURVIVE

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POVERTY WITHIN A RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE

In Appalachia isolation and poverty are a reality for many, but so are a rich cultural heritage and a history of organizing. In this context adult education means more than academic degrees, more than straight literacy. But people's ideas of what education ought to look like are derived from years of acculturation and schooling. This may limit the degree to which community organizing and activism are integrated with formal basic skills education. While people understand the value of informal learning in their community organizing and development work, they may not apply this understanding to their education programs. Organizations may be a powerful voice for community development and social change, but still have very conventional literacy and adult classes. Even in organizations that are based on a vision of bringing about a more equal distribution of power in their communities, there are many barriers to realizing this vision in adult education programs.

Scattered throughout the mountains of Appalachia in the southeastern United States, a growing number of community-based organizations are practicing literacy and adult education work in a different way. These organizations, rooted in the region's rich history of organizing, are trying various ways to link their literacy and adult education work with the community development issues their groups also address.

Here we describe the region, its history, its strengths and its problems, and the organizations that have developed in communities to confront those problems. We offer examples of three rural organizations whose mission is the strengthening and empowering of communities as well as improving individual literacy skills. Finally, we will reflect on the ways those organizations have met

some of their goals, and the distance that yet remains in understanding and implementing this literacy in a different way.

THE APPALACHIAN REGION

The Appalachian region of the United States is often portrayed by the media as a desolate region of "hills and hollers" and poor isolated communities of impoverished people. This current image of the region replaces an earlier version of a land of hardy mountaineers preserving a culture of ballads and quaint speech. There is some truth in both versions, but both are far too simplistic. Much of the area does remain isolated, but while a family may be far from hospitals and schools, they are close to neighbours and kin. Traditional music and food are still part of people's lives, but so are MTV and McDonald's. What is prevalent is an economy based on extractive industry, a pattern of outside ownership of land and natural resources, unemployment consistently above national levels, and access to services consistently below what is available to most Americans. Appalachia is a changing region, one which is becoming more and more connected to the "mainstream", but which remains distinct.

The Appalachian Mountains run down the length of the eastern United States from New York to Alabama. But the term Appalachia usually refers to the central part of the region — east Tennessee, eastern Kentucky, the far western part of Virginia, and most of West Virginia — the region most affected by coal mining. It is home to some five million people, most of whom live in small towns or in the rugged countryside. Flat land is limited and is mostly in river bottoms prone to flooding. Most of the mineral resources are owned and extracted by coal companies headquartered outside the region.

History & Economy

The southern mountains were home to Cherokee, Shawnee, and other Native American peoples who perfected many aspects of the art of living there. They passed these skills on to the European settlers who began arriving in the 18th century. The Europeans, calling themselves Americans, eliminated the native peoples, whom they called Indians, and took the land. In the days of Daniel Boone the mountains were at the cutting edge of the westward expansion of the United States, but soon the area was again isolated, a land of subsistence farming with little connection to the outside world. A part of the South, the mountains were nonetheless home to more abolitionists than slaves, and during the Civil War this region provided soldiers to both sides.

Around 1890 various outsiders began to observe that the mountains were a fabulous treasury of natural wealth. For the next 20 years agents of northern capital crisscrossed the region buying up mineral and timber rights until by 1910

substantially the entire stock of natural resources was in the hands of a few outsiders — where it remains today.

From that day to this, the story of Appalachia has been one of extractive industry. First to go were the trees; by 1920 the largest hardwood forest in North America was only a memory. Mining commenced in earnest around 1910, and for 80 years Central Appalachia has been home to a large part of the U.S. coal industry. This region has produced wealth by the untold billions. The mountains have also been home to numerous small and a few major manufacturing industries, particularly on the periphery of the coal region. Small sewing factories employing mostly women have been common. And while there was no major agriculture, subsistence farming continued to supplement many families' income. While the region has always been isolated and impoverished in comparison with much of the rest of the nation, many people lived reasonably well.

But today the region is in a state of economic crisis. A new round of mechanization in mining is reducing employment drastically, even as production sets new records. Real unemployment in the coal counties is running from 30-60%, and when we look into the future we see that the apparently inexhaustible reserves of coal are themselves coming to an end. Small manufacturing has diminished as many of the region's factories have been moved overseas. Many local governments today are pinning their hopes for the future on the construction of prisons. Some are tempted by the promise of jobs to allow their deep valleys to be turned into dumps for the trash of the nation's cities. The conventional economic development strategy of developing "growth centers", building highways and improving other infrastructure in an attempt to attract outside industry has for the most part been a failure.

Role of Education in Region

The chronic poverty and underdevelopment of the region is often blamed on poor schools and poor education, on a culture which does not value education. There have been and are problems with education in this region. Kraybill, Johnson and Deaton[2] compared the seven Appalachian coal counties of Virginia with state-wide educational accomplishments. Their findings give an indication of the situation of education in the region.

Educational indicator - 1980

	All of Virginia	Coal Countries
Adults with high school diploma	62.4%	38.3%
People with 4+ years college	19.1%	6.3%
Drop-out rate, grades 8 - 12	5.3%	6.3%
High school graduates going to college	52.8%	38.7%

Per pupil expenditure in the coal counties is about 85% of the average state rate in Virginia.

This substandard educational situation (worse in other central Appalachian states), is a symptom rather than a cause of Appalachia's problems. Schools are clearly underfunded. The county governments might have taken on the mineral companies and taxed the only valuable asset in their counties, but the realities of power distribution have made that nearly impossible. Some students stay in school and go on to achieve in American society; but for many of those, "success" has meant leaving the region. Much of what has been written about children of "minority" groups in the U.S. might also be true of mountain children. When finishing school has no clear benefits, when success means leaving family and home, perhaps dropping out makes sense. When schools devalue your language, fail to teach your history, disparage your music and culture and encourage a competition you reject, resistance may seem a healthy alternative. Education as historically practiced in mountain schools has often been education for getting out, not education for staying and confronting the problems of the region.

There is also a history of adult education in Appalachia. For the most part the goal of these programs has been to make mountain people more like the rest of the country. Church missionaries established settlement schools to "raise the spiritual, social, educational and economic standards of the mountain people".[3] *The Moonlight Schools*, adult literacy classes held in the evenings in mountain communities in the World War I era, aimed to "Americanize" Appalachians in the same way that immigrants to the United States were being Americanized in urban areas. A few efforts, notably those of the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee and the *Appalachian Folk Life Center* in West Virginia were based on the belief that education shoulc help adults make their own decisions about their lives and communities. These two organizations continue to work with communities working for change today.

But most current programs continue to provide education to help people better fit into the economy. The envelopes of the regional state-funded adult education program in southwest Virginia call for "Re-Tooling Workers in Virginia". Government operated programs, using federal and state funds and often referred to as ABE (*Adult Basic Education*), offer primarily individual instruction in literacy and preparation for taking the "GED" (*General Education Development*) test, a secondary school diploma equivalent. This instruction is usually offered in a classroom setting. In addition some private volunteer literacy groups provides one-on-one tutoring for adults at the lowest literacy levels. Published standardized materials are prevalent in both settings.

Organizing & Resistance

It would be a mistake to see the history of Appalachia as an unopposed series of expropriations. The region has a long history of resistance beginning with the *Whiskey Rebellion* against taxes imposed on small farmers by George Washington's administration and the battles by the Cherokee to preserve their land and culture in the Carolina mountains. The Mineworkers union has been one of the most militant in the U.S. labour movement, and union battles have also occurred in other Appalachian industries. Particularly in the last thirty years there has been an ôoutburst of community organizing across Appalachia"[4] around issues as diverse as education, welfare reform, tax reform, and opposition to stripmining and toxic dumps.

While most of these efforts have been organized around single issues there are also many community organizations which confront a broad range of local problems, and there are a few broad-based multi-issue regional organizations. The community groups are often started either to confront an immediate threat like poisoned water or to meet the community's basic needs, but have tended to evolve to also include both education and economic development as part of their mission. The groups are linked in informal networks and are often led by women.

The three groups described in this article are examples of community-based organizations working to confront problems of their members. Each organization is independent, democratically controlled and funded by piecing together small private and state grants as well as local fundraising efforts. Each group includes literacy instruction in their program and builds the literacy of its members in informal ways as well. And each is located in a rural area where access to educational programs and social services is very limited for many people.

While the organizations have much in common, they differ in their approach to literacy work. The *McClure River Valley Development Center* is involved in a wide variety of community issues and directly confronts injustice in innovative ways. But their literacy and basic adult education work is in many ways separate from other Center activities. In *Ivanhoe*, the Civic League has operated a traditional literacy program, but is now working to make both their education programs and their staff structure more democratic. *Appalachian Communities for Children* recognizes the importance of participatory education and tries to respond to many community needs, but has generally stopped short of collectively addressing the underlying causes of poverty and joblessness which are so pervasive in their students' lives.

THE McCLURE RIVER VALLEY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CENTER

"Me and my wife have been in this a year and a half and never [found] anything bad in it." [This is how one man talked about the McClure River Valley Community Development Center.]

The Center is in one of the poorest and most isolated counties in Virginia. The terrain is rugged with long ridges and narrow valleys and hollows. Sixty per cent of the land is owned by the outside coal corporations which dominate the economy. Official unemployment was 17.4% in October,1992, down from 20.2% in 1985. The county seat and largest town has a population of 1,542 in a county with 17,620 people.

The Center is the location for many varied activities. Parties and baby showers are held by people who rent the Center for the occasion. Special events are sponsored by the Center, for example a vigil held on the eve of the war in the Persian Gulf and an effort of many months providing meals for miners active in a long strike. However, most of the activities are part of the Development Center's efforts to meet the needs of the people in their communities. These ongoing efforts include the food distribution program *SHARE*, GED classes, a pre-school, aerobics classes, Saturday dances and educational/volunteer activities for groups of college students.

Share

SHARE is a national effort to distribute low-cost food and encourage community service. The food is obtained and distributed regionally, but local distribution is organized and conducted by community groups. The Center takes part in *SHARE* and distributes food once a month. Anyone can buy a "share" for $13.40 for which they receive $30 - $40 worth of food. The Center is responsible for collecting the money or food stamps, ordering the shares, arranging for the food to be picked up at a warehouse, and handling distribution. This work is coordinated by volunteers. Fifteen to twenty people help each month, filling boxes for anyone who has bought a share. The *SHARE* distribution seems to help people stretch their food money, gives people a chance to visit, and is a way to involve people in the work of the Center. It is a fair amount of work, but the work is well-organized and "shared".

The Pre-School

Probably the most ambitious project run by the MRVDC is the preschool. It

has been in operation for eight years. The program is run by one of the two paid Center staff people with the help of volunteers, primarily mothers of the children in the program. A van picks up the children each morning and brings them to the Center, the children arriving around 9:30 and staying until 12:30.

The preschool program is designed to prepare the children for school by teaching them academic skills including saying and recognizing the alphabet and the numbers from one to ten, naming and recognizing body parts and colours. They are taught to follow directions and behave in a structured classroom setting. The day is scheduled without a lot of free play. The children are encouraged to write the letters and their names and to use scissors, but there does not seem to be much art or science. The children's work which was displayed in the room were worksheets to match letters or numbers and pages from a Ninja Turtle colouring book which they had coloured. The children sing enthusiastically and know several songs.

Adult Education Classes

The basic skills classes at the Center are taught by an Adult Basic Education teacher hired by the county. She is assisted by one of the two Catholic nuns who work with the Center. The class meets twice a week for three hours and has seven or eight students. The class seems very much driven by the goal of obtaining a GED, or high school diploma equivalent. Each student works independently in a GED preparation book. Students who are not at that level work with the teachers in other texts. There is little group instruction. While several of the students are involved in Center activities, others only come to this class.

In addition to the GED class, adult reading instruction is provided by one of the nuns and other tutors trained in the *Laubach Way to Reading*. Tutoring is done privately in another building. Some students do both, having individual tutoring in reading and working in class on math. In neither of these programs does the curriculum seem integrated with the rest of the Center's work.

Other community centers in southwest Virginia hold community college classes, but McClure River has only done this once or twice, explaining that most people aren't ready for college classes yet, but that they will hold them when there is a demand.

The Center is involved in another kind of educational work through their student volunteer program. During summer and school holidays groups of high school and college students from outside the area come and stay at the Center and do volunteer work in the community, for example repairing houses. While this is helpful to the community, it is probably even more valuable to the students who get the opportunity to visit and learn from people in the community.

Other Activities

On most Saturday nights the Center hosts dances to provide fundraising events and recreation. Local bands, both *bluegrass* and rock, play and the tables are set up like a club. Admission is around $5.00, depending on the band.

Aerobics classes for women meet on Thursday nights. Bible school is held in the summer. The Center also hosts many visitors interested in their work.

Responding to Special Times

While most of what happens at the Center is directly related to the immediate needs of the community, there is also involvement in issues beyond those on the River. In 1989 southwest Virginia was the scene of a long, bitter strike between the *United Mine Workers* and the Pittston Company. The struggle involved many people including miners and their families and other supporters, both local and from outside. The Center is located near many of the Pittston mines and became the site of a support center for the miners. The strikers used the Center as a place to meet and rest. Hundreds of meals were served every day and the Center was both a haven and a source of support for the strike. The effects of this involvement continued after the strike was over. This is discussed in the section on the women of the Center.

When the war in the Persian Gulf region began, the Center helped sponsor and was the site for a forum on the war and a prayer vigil. And while the events were far away the impact was quite local. A staff member's son was one of the many people from the mountains who were sent to the Gulf.

The vigil, held on a snowy evening in February was organized by several local organizations. The program began with a panel discussion on the reasons for the war and the effects both immediate and long term, ending with a vigil of prayer and songs held inside because of the weather.

The Board Meeting

The Development Commission is governed by a Board of Directors which meets monthly and is made up of local residents, who share the problems of the Valley's people. A few "resource" people, primarily religious workers, participate in the meetings, but do not have a vote. The meetings are well organized and productive. An agenda is written on newsprint and members receive copies of minutes and financial reports. Written materials are reviewed orally as well.

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The Women & The Center

The Center is a community centre not a women's centre, yet women seem to be the most active members and do most of the work. And the programs seem to meet the needs of women more than men, although both are involved in the dances and *SHARE*. Women are clearly the strongest force in the organization.

Working at the Center has made a significant difference in the lives of the most active women. One woman who is very active described the impact of her work:

> Working with these people here in this center, they showed their love and their support and everybody, we're like brother and sister. My life is a complete turn-around from what it was before.... I learned things I never thought I would ever learn. It really made a difference in my life. It's a complete different world.... I'm really proud of the growth I've seen in the people that's got involved with me here.

The staff member who teaches in the pre-school spoke of all she had learned:

> Even though I finished school and I've taken night classes and I've been here and there, but actually the best education I've had was when I came to this center.... Communication with these people is the best education there is. I learned how to talk to people because I'm an outspoken person and I've learned who to talk to and who not to talk to, how their feelings are. I've learned that everybody's not the same as the other person. You've got to treat everybody different. There's some people that's more fragile than other people. I learned that just by working through this center.

Several of the women who first came to the centre when their husbands were on strike have continued to be actively involved.

Education & Change

For the women, the importance of the work and working together seems clear. Many of them spoke of how they felt changed and strengthened and how they had seen others change. Around a dozen people, most of them women, volunteer several hours a week to the Center's work. While they give, they also receive, possibly some material help, but primarily the satisfaction of making a change in their community. It also seems that the organization has developed ways for people to work together to get things accomplished. Conflicts seem to be confronted and settled. Both the *SHARE* distribution and the board meeting utilize carefully worked out organizational processes. The preschool and the dances both have procedures for involving people. The organization works.

When the group of women from the Center discussed their own education they were very clear about the value of informal learning and group support at the Center. But this understanding is not reflected in either the preschool or the adult education classes at the Center, both of which are highly structured around traditional curriculum, what school is "supposed" to be. Both also depend on volunteers, and there may be a belief that it is easier for

volunteers to work in a highly structured program. Yet there is also a belief that drill in "readiness" activities — the letters, numbers, colors, shapes — is what the children need to succeed in school. The preschool teacher commented that at Head Start (a federally-funded preschool program) they "weren't allowed to teach them anything," and free play and unstructured creative activities were not a big part of her program. This is also true of at least some of the kindergarten classes in public schools in this area.

The *McClure River Valley Community Development Center* stands for more equitable power for ordinary people, such as supporting the striking miners, yet does not always extend that position to the classroom. McClure classes look in many ways like those of government-supported ABE programs. While the McClure group is not currently planning changes in its education program, the group is exploring ways to use participatory research in a project to improve water and sewer systems.

Despite the difficulties in integrating their shared-power approach into adult education classes, *McClure River Valley Community Development Center staff* and participants have made important, positive contributions to their community. The McClure group has created opportunities for people to become involved in solving problems together, getting child care and education services close to their homes, and participating in community life in ways that were not previously possible.

THE IVANHOE CIVIC LEAGUE

The town of Ivanhoe, population 800, is about 100 miles east of McClure. The mountains are not as steep, farming is more important, with some mining of zinc and lead. But the last mine closed in 1981 fifteen years after the carbide factory, the town's other large employer, shut down. In 1986 when the local county governments announced their plans to sell the industrial land — the last hope for bringing industry back to the community — people came together in the *Ivanhoe Civic League* to oppose the sale. They were able to stop the sale of the land and began to try to find an industry to locate there. This has not happened, but a lot else has.

The Civic League began a process of community building which has included the development of a park along the New River on some of the land slated for industrial development; an annual Jubilee Festival in the park which is a kind of community reunion with food, drama, music and a parade; a housing rehabilitation project with college volunteers; and a community newsletter. The Civic League also published a two volume history of the community based on extensive interviews.[5] and participated in the *SHARE* program and is developing a youth-run radio station. There has been an extensive education program including an economics discussion group, Biblical reflection, and the more formal GED classes, a literacy program, and community college classes taught

in the community.

The Civic League education work currently is focused in three areas: the college volunteer program, the adult education project, and working with young people. The youth work includes an after-school tutoring program and support and educational counseling where they are advised about courses to take in secondary school for college preparation. When they are ready for college, Civic League staff offer advice on financial aide and help students prepare and apply for college. The Civic League also has a Youth Council working to develop a local radio station.

For many years college volunteers have come to the Appalachian region to help people. In Ivanhoe, too, college volunteers are used to help in the community. But while the community values what the volunteers can offer, the Civic League is aware that the community has much to offer the volunteers. The education of the college students by the community is deliberate and carefully planned. Groups of students come to Ivanhoe during their school holidays and spend a week or two repairing houses, helping with work at the Civic League, and visiting in the community. They also meet with Civic League staff to examine their preconceptions about poverty in the region.

Adult education has been an important part of the Civic League since the Oral History Project grew out of a community college history class. In 1990, 14 people graduated with GED certificates after attending adult basic education classes taught by a volunteer with the Civic League. Now the two staff educators are working to make their program more democratic and participatory and to more closely connect adult students with other work of the Civic League.

The League has recently received special funding from the state to develop an adult educaton program which integrates literacy, GED preparation and training in job specific skills. The project will be community based. Former students will be trained as tutors, and students will be involved in planning and governing the project. The staff also hopes to involve more adult students in the other work of the Civic League. A challenge has been to develop the program in a way that both meets the requirements of the state and is participatory and learner-centered. A student assessment and evaluation process based on student goals instead of standardized testing is being developed by the staff, with the hope of educating the state education people about this process.

The education staff is contending with the expectations of both the state education bureaucracy and some of their students to have traditional adult education classes which are teacher centered and focused on preparing individuals for the GED test. At the same time, the entire Civic League staff is also involved in changing to a more democratic work style after several years under the strong leadership of one person.

Despite the unmet challenges of economic development, Ivanhoe Civic League has managed to make important and lasting changes in the community. Housing has been rehabilitated, music, drama and cultural celebrations held, young people involved and educational goals met.

APPALACHIAN COMMUNITIES FOR CHILDREN

We have a different way of thinking about what education is. It's not just something that you learn within the school that somebody else tells you is important, but it's how you lead your life, what's going on around you. It's not just learning to do certain things and getting graded on it.

Judy Martin, Director
Appalachian Communities for Children

In 1974 a group of parents came together in Jackson County, Kentucky, to try to get a *Head Start* program for their children. In many ways, there was little reason to believe that they could accomplish such a feat. In the mountains of eastern Kentucky, grinding poverty was all around, illiteracy rates were among the highest in the nation. There was no hospital and few doctors and there were no colleges or vocational schools. Unemployment was high and training opportunities few. Perhaps the most immediate and difficult problem of all was the lack of a proper building. The federal government would not bring Head Start to the area without a structure that met extensive requirements.

Despite these obstacles, the group formed Appalachian Communities for Children (ACC) and began working for quality education and their right to involvement in schools.

Public School Programs

What we learned by working in our parents' group was the importance of acceptance of each child and the learning style they have, the value of that child. We're teaching math, but we're also teaching that each person is important...What's important is not just teaching subject matter, it's teaching children to believe in themselves in such a way that the expectation is there that the child will succeed. We've found that seven different kids can learn math seven different ways, but only one of them is thought to be right by teachers. Sometimes we forget to respect all the ways of learning.

Judy Martin

Throughout the 1980's and to the present, a very important part of ACC's work has been in the public schools. Every day, ACC volunteers teach in Jackson County schools, and parent volunteer efforts are growing in Clay County. The ACC parent volunteers work in classrooms to encourage alternative curriculum that is hands-on. Often based in community and family life, parent volunteers are busy helping children read and write books, experience math through the use of real-life manipulatives, and learn more about their communities. ACC workers don't look for parent volunteers that fit the stereotype of middle-class moms, but instead are often successful in helping rural parents of all economic levels participate in their children's education.

Funding of rural schools has been a serious problem in Kentucky as elsewhere in the United States. The Jackson and Clay county school systems are among the poorest in Kentucky. There are no art or music teachers in K - 8th

grade in the most rural schools, so some children have never had a single art or music teacher in their first nine school years. There is one counselor in Jackson County who has to deal with over 1000 school children.

As a part of the ground-breaking school reform legislation enacted in 1990, Kentucky's schools now have ungraded primary sections, more emphasis on site-based management, and give parents more voice in decision-making. It is hoped that this will lead to schools resembling the Head Start programs which ACC developed long ago: activist parents and community people working with school professionals to create schools meeting the unique needs of families and children of the area.

The legislation also established Family Resource Centers, which may include early childhood development programs, inter-generational efforts, and parent involvement projects. For two years running, ACC has produced the top-rated plans for the development of Family Resource Centers in two Kentucky schools, through the use of extensive, participatory planning processes that involve a wide range of ACC parent volunteers, school personnel and others.

Adult & Community Education

When we first started our adult education program, other people were sure we would fail. Our idea was that we know a lot of things and we could teach one another and what we didn't know, we could learn... and now we are one of the few parent groups in Kentucky out of 120 counties that run the whole adult education program in the county. In almost all of the other counties, the school systems run the programs. In ours, the parents — low income parents — run the program. I want to bring you the good news that even though they said we were just a bunch of hillbillies... we won the Outstanding Adult Education award for having the best program in all of the South Central Kentucky counties.

Judy Martin

This different way of thinking about education is reflected in ACC's adult education work. ACC has developed literacy, adult basic education and GED preparation classes, as well as classes which are not academic in nature. The form each takes changes with the needs and wants of the participants.

One key to ACC's success is their staff who are very well-trained but are not certified teachers. In fact, several ACC teachers are graduates of the ACC GED programs themselves. ACC holds classes in their learning centers, in various communities in Jackson and Clay counties, in the jail, the prison, and other places. Last year over 500 people were a part of ACC's literacy and adult education program.

A barrier facing conventional programs is the isolation and separation of classes from the things that community people find familiar and comfortable. Adults are often asked to go to a strange place, and to engage in something they have failed at before — school. ACC has found ways to help overcome some of these barriers and one of the clearest examples is in their use of crafts.

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The Crafts Class

Recently, ACC held a class in which participants made baskets. This community education class helped people feel comfortable with the organization and gave ACC workers the opportunity to talk a bit about other classes while offering people the opportunity to participate in them. ACC even held a series of adult basic education classes that built the curriculum on craft-making. As participants worked on their crafts, they read and wrote about craft-making, learned measuring and other mathematical operations by figuring materials or measurements needed for crafts. ACC gives coupons for attendance in any class (and double for bringing someone). People trade in the coupons for craft materials and kits which are often put together by volunteers.

The Men's Reading Class

In 1991, when state regulations changed and school bus drivers had to obtain a commercial driver's license (CDL) or lose their jobs, passing the CDL test became a pressing concern for many local people. ACC offered a preparation class for these drivers, and many completed the class and passed their test. Several enjoyed the experience so much they didn't want to stop going to class. The "men's reading class" has continued even though their original goal of passing the bus driver's test has been met. The teacher of the class feels that one of her responsibilities is to create a community within the class, an atmosphere of acceptance, one in which participants are respected for the experience and knowledge they already have. These adult learners visited various places in the community, took pictures, wrote, and generally sharpened their reading and writing skills in the context of their daily lives.

Family Life & Community Health

> We saw that things were happening in different hollers, but people didn't know about each others' experiences. It was people coming together and saying "What happened to you — that happened to me too!"

Family life and community health efforts are an important part of ACC's work. In the *Mountain Scout* program, women visit other women to talk about and encourage screenings for breast and cervical cancer. The program is based on the idea that neighbours and friends have more access and influence with community people than "outsiders" do, so community women are employed and trained as the home visitors. A day care centre is being built in Clay County. ACC is active in the *East Kentucky Child Care Coalition*, and is helping develop a network of home day care providers both to give families better access to child

care and to give local women an opportunity to create small businesses.

ACC has developed the *Resource Mothers* program, where workers visit pregnant and new teenage mothers and help them learn about nutrition and health issues. ACC also holds prenatal classes for women of any age who want to work with other expectant mothers to learn more about maternal and infant health.

Change Doesn't Come Easily

> We don't want to make it sound like it was easy, we've had some failures. It hurts to work hard and then not get something. And it doesn't happen fast. We didn't spring up full-grown. We went through a long, hard process in terms of our confidence and ability to handle what we wanted to do....
>
> Judy Martin

ACC has helped people have a voice in education, provided leadership development opportunities, and offered a way for people to support each other as they work toward social justice goals. They have acted on the belief that all adults have valuable knowledge and skills that can be shared in the community, including in schools, adult education, and health enhancement efforts. As ACC has tried to put these principles into action, they've found that change does not come easily. Embedded power structures do not bend quickly or act inclusively; there usually must be hard work, patience and a willingness to be confrontative on occasion.

REFLECTIONS

The three organizations we looked at are in different communities, but share the same culture and history. Much of the work they do is similar; some projects are unique to a particular community. Each group is working to improve life for people in the community both by meeting individual needs for better food, housing, and education and by trying to influence the decisions of government to serve their communities better. Each organization is made up of people from the community working together in a democratic fashion, recognizing that the distribution of power and resources in Appalachia must be changed for the needs of their communities to be truly met. And each organization has impressed the importance of literacy learning upon their members and the community, both through formal instruction of basic academic skills and through the skills learned and practiced in the ongoing work and special projects of the organization.

Formal adult education programs are a major part of the work of Appalachian Communities for Children, and both the Ivanhoe Civic League and the McClure River Center's programs include adult education. All their organizations provide

basic literacy instruction as well as classes to help people prepare to take the GED test for a high school equivalency certificate. ACC has offered other classes including crafts and preparation for the Commercial Driver's License test, while Ivanhoe has brought community college classes to the community.

All three organizations have also provided many non-formal opportunities for learning and literacy use. and many staff and board members even with limited formal education and literacy skills, have learned and continue to learn both the skills needed for their particular jobs and the knowledge and skills involved in running an organization.

When we look at these three organizations we see groups which take clear stands for more equitable power for ordinary people and which have recognized the importance of people having a voice and control over their own lives, yet are perhaps not as strong or as supportive of the overall goals of the organizations as they might be. There is an emerging sense of the importance of long term organization building and leadership development and the role of adult education in this work, but this has not been included in programs systematically. Although the education programs of these organizations meet the individual educational needs of many people, the organizations themselves could benefit with more integrated programs.

State Adult Basic Education funding received affects the size of programs, administrative procedures, testing, and may tend to limit not only the issues raised but also serve to legitimize formal schooling. When adult education is practiced in a traditional, teacher-centred way and the people are involved only in education classes, they don't benefit from all the other kinds of learning resulting from active membership of the organization. People in these organizations have not had much experience being in situations where they are respected, thought of as leaders, share power. Democratically structured, student-centred classes focusing on community issues could be a place to gain such experiences.

Contradictions

Why, when these organizations are so committed to empowering the members of their community and to bringing about change, have the formal education programs been more traditional? The groups themselves recognize the contradictions and are exploring ways to change and democratize their classes, but the work is hard. Many factors may contribute to the difficulty.

Even when people recognize the value of experiential learning in their own lives, traditional schooling is a powerful cultural force in the United States. Programs are driven by students' desire for a GED, a diploma which is necessary to qualify for additional training or to get a job (though this result may be more perceived than real). And the cultural images associated with graduation are powerful. The opportunity to wear a cap and gown, to take part in a graduation

ceremony, to have "finished" school are very important to many people.

It is of course true that classes which prepare people for the GED test can be conducted in ways which are student-centred, democratically run and focused on community issues. But it is hard to come up with ideas about doing school differently unless you have had experience with alternatives. Most people in community organizations have only experienced schooling which is quite conservative and there are few models or opportunities for learning alternative approaches. We have learned from our own experience that just reading about alternatives is not always enough to enable us to really change our practice. It takes time and support. And as one community activist and educator put it, "There are so many hoops. People get exhausted. To get the money and all the rest of it to come together is impossible."

Needed: A clear role for Adult Education

While there are some networks of community organizations, there is no political movement or a political agenda that would link these groups and efforts. For example the United Mine Workers union did not use the mobilization of people around the Pittston strike to move forward on broader goals. There is not a sense of adult education programs contributing to long term political mobilization and political change. In countries where people are part of a political movement, adult education happens in a different context. The methodology may not be particularly innovative, but the purposes are really different and the people involved, both teachers and students, understand the connections of their education work with a larger struggle.

This was the case with the Citizenship Schools during the civil rights movement in the U.S. south and in Nicaragua after the 1979 revolution. Despite all the disasters of the past ten or so years in Appalachia, people are not mobilized around a political agenda in which adult education has a clear role.

Even in difficult circumstances, people in McClure, Ivanhoe and Appalachian Communities for Children are bringing about change and empowering themselves and their communities. None of the three organizations we profile, nor others we know about and certainly not we ourselves, have all the answers. We are just beginning to understand how literacy and adult education work can be linked to help create skilled individuals and to strengthen and develop communities from within.

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Notes & References

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